

Visionotes

St. John's Lutheran Church
January 2024



Sweet Wednesday Christmas Party
Holy Community every Wednesday night
with grades 9-12. Better together!

What DID Jesus Do? — p. 5

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We are the church — together.

Worship in the Sanctuary: Saturdays at 5pm & Sundays at 9am

Livestream Worship on YouTube: Sundays at 9am

Weekly Online Worship at www.StJohns-LC.org

Church Office: 608-882-4044, Mon-Thurs, 8am-4pm

St. John's Staff

Pastor	Matthew Pock
Pastor of Congregational Care	Jerry Tews
Office Manager	Chris Cole
Community Life Coordinator	Becca Pock
Children's Ministry Director	Callie Jones
Financial Director	Deb Herbers
Music Director	Sharon Magee
Custodian	Emily Schmitzer
Ministry Coordinator	Carolyn Butts
Communication Coordinator	Alyse Miller
Nursery	Mikayla Samuelson
Little Fish Preschool Teacher	Melissa Blake

2023 Church Council

President	Jeff Updike
Vice President/Life & Growth	Amy Larson
Secretary/Fellowship	Keith Miller
Treasurer	Brandon Mohrbacher
Building and Grounds	Sean Mangold
Memorials	Dan Millin
Music and Worship	Rena Smith
Mutual Ministry	Julie Creek-Hessler
Parish Education	Bethany Steindl
Social Concerns	Debbe Topel
Stewardship	Eric Peterson
Youth Ministry	Erika Stoker
Youth Representative	Jack Burton

Mission Endowment & Scholarship Fund Committee:

Rhonda Crans, David Karr, Jenna Mangold,
Lynda Moseley, Jonathan Schalow

Mutual Ministry Committee:

Jeanna Blume, Wanda King, Ann Legris,
Joy Olson, Gordy Miller, Glenace Smelcer

Why Gather?

19th in a series of “why” questions about what we do as a church, particularly during worship



Three mornings a week I wake up in the dark to drive to Stoughton to swim (and these days it’s still dark when I drive home). I never thought I’d be such an early bird, but I go at that sleepy hour because that’s when my team swims together. I could go at other times of the day, but I choose to swim with my team—our unofficial roster currently has 15 swimmers. I could certainly swim and train without a team, but gathering with other swimmers matters.

I’ve often been asked *why* it matters to swim with a team. After all, we can’t talk to each other while our heads are in the water, and we can technically train alone. Nonetheless, my team makes a big difference in my training. We motivate each other. We watch over each other. We problem-solve together. We show up for each other. If I didn’t have other people waiting for me and relying on me, I’m sure I would skip some days. My teammates have become my friends, too. We support each other in the pool and out of the pool. I could still be a swimmer without my team, but I know that I am a better swimmer because I swim with other people.

Which brings us to the church. **I know I am a better follower of Jesus Christ because I gather with other followers.** Yes, you can try to be a Christian on your own, but it’s much harder. I admit that I need help from others. When we gather together as Christians, we motivate each other, we watch over each other, we support each other, we strengthen each other. If we didn’t have other people hoping we’ll come to worship, we might skip worship completely. As we gather together, we grow in friendship and support each other in faith *and* in life. Our relationships extend beyond “church time,” and they add to our overall well-being.

Jesus himself chose to gather followers together. He called them to follow him, and he trained them to love by first loving each other. “Love one another as I have loved you,” Jesus said (John 13:34). How can we love one another if we are alone? Plus, it’s much easier to love the world—like providing disaster relief and confronting world hunger—when we do it

together. God works through the power of community, including online community. The Christian faith is inherently communal, and we build community when we gather together. Gathering with Christians matters. Every worship service at St. John's has four movements, and the first is called "Gathering." As stated in the bulletin and on the screen, we believe that "the Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God." The "Gathering" portion of worship prepares us to read the Word of God (2nd movement), to receive the meal of Holy Communion (3rd movement), and to be sent out to live our faith (4th movement). The "Gathering" sets us up to encounter God and one another. **And when we truly encounter God and one another, our lives are changed... for the good.**

Something *holy* happens when we encounter God and each other. And it's not something we can fully quantify. Research can tell us that our brain chemistry depends on human interaction, but it cannot fully explain the holiness of seeing the faces of friends, of smiling at a stranger, of shaking hands with a neighbor, of hearing the noises of babies. Gathering as the church is one of the few occasions in life that can put us in contact with the complete range and gifts of people of every generation. In my years before I was a pastor, I sought out a church in Minneapolis. A kind, elderly gentleman named Harold helped me feel at home. I joined that church, in part, because of his care and support. I received an inter-generational gift from the church I didn't even know I was looking for or could articulate at the time. We were the church together. It was holy.

Whenever we gather as the church, for any event, the time together has such potential to lift us up, to fill us up, and to connect us with God and God's people. Our gatherings won't ever be perfect; we're human, too. Nor we will always get just what we think we want. But we might receive what we need... or give what someone else needs. After all, we don't gather just for ourselves; we gather for the whole. That's part of being on a team. Our team—St. John's Lutheran Church—makes a big difference in my life, and I pray it does for you. I hope to see you as we gather in 2024.

In Christ,

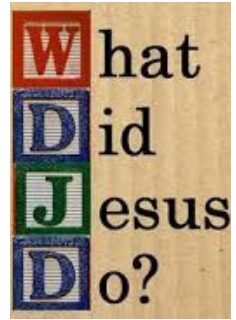


*"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."
— Jesus (Matthew 18:20)*

REACHING UP: WORSHIP & PRAYER

What DID Jesus Do?: A 6-Week Worship Series

A popular wrist band from the 1990s had a four-letter abbreviation: W.W.J.D. It stood for “What would Jesus do?” The intention was to remind the person wearing it to follow Jesus in their words and actions. The phrase first appeared to wide audiences in the title of a book by Charles Sheldon. “In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?” was first published in 1896 and ranks as one of the best-selling books of all time. It’s a religious fiction novel which the author first delivered as sermons, a chapter a week. The various characters of the book seek to honor Jesus as they live their lives – an honorable pursuit.



As we seek to follow in Jesus’s steps today, it’s helpful to know what Jesus actually did do. Jesus healed the sick, he touched the outcasts, he taught the crowds, he performed miracles, he forgave sins, and he loved people as they were. But how did he do that? And what else did he do? Over six weeks we’ll look closely at what Jesus actually did and how he did it... so that we might pattern our lives on his and better understand what he truly did for us.

- January 6 & 7... Mark 1:21-45 (Jesus’ Ministry Begun)
 - What Did Jesus Do? Week 1 - He shocked!
 - Remembering Your Baptism Milestone for Kindergarteners
 - Bluegrass Worship Weekend
- January 13 & 14... Mark 2:1-22 (Jesus Heals and Teaches)
 - What Did Jesus Do? Week 2 - He blasphemed!
 - Ten Commandments Milestone for First Graders
- January 20 & 21... Mark 4:1-34 (Parables in Mark)
 - What Did Jesus Do? Week 3 - He exposed!
- January 27 & 28... Mark 5:1-12 (Gerasene Demoniac)
 - What Did Jesus Do? Week 4 - He exorcised!
 - Sunday, Annual Meeting, following 9am worship

MORNING PRAYER SERVICE, TUESDAYS @8:30

St. John’s Prayer Chapel; a 20-minute service of prayer

You are invited. All are welcome.

Remember Your Baptism Milestone — January 7

In the book of Romans, Paul writes “We have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.” In baptism God claims us forever, and the people around us (parents, sponsors, and congregation) make promises to help us grow in our faith.

So what does this mean to a Kindergartener?



On January 7, these students and their families will dive into what the promises of baptism mean and how we live as baptized children of God. St. John’s is committed to helping our children and families grow in their faith. During our **9am worship**, kindergarteners will receive a small gift and a blessing. At **10:15am, we will gather for a workshop** just for kindergarteners and parents.

Ten Commandments Milestone — January 14

God’s people received the Ten Commandments because God loves us and wants us to live in healthy relationships with God and with others. Though sometimes rules can feel confining, God’s Commandments are intended to give us freedom through clear boundaries. We will celebrate our faith milestone, The Ten Commandments, **during our 9am worship on Sunday, January 14, with our first grade students.**

At 10:15am, first graders and their parents will explore the Ten Commandments together in a workshop. We will work on understanding what each commandment means and why they still matter in our modern lives. All families with a first grader are invited to participate in this milestone.

“Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away.”
– Deuteronomy 6:6-7



Bluegrass Worship Weekend — January 6 & 7

The season of Epiphany will start with toe-tappin' and hands-clappin' Bluegrass worship led by St. John's Praise Team. Bluegrass is a unique American genre of music, born in Appalachia, with influences from Scottish ballads, Irish dance tunes, blues, jazz, and church music. Its high-energy sound features acoustic string instruments. Expect bluegrass favorites including "I Saw the Light," "Down to the River to Pray," "Victory is Mine," and "I'll Fly Away." **Mark your calendars and wear your flannel and boots for January 6 and 7!**



Ash Wednesday and Our 40-Day Journey of Lent



Lent is a season when the Church reflects on the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection. It is a time of repentance, fasting, and preparation for Easter. It is a time of self-examination, a time to focus on our relationship with God.

Lent is a season of forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday.

On Ash Wednesday, February 14, we will gather for worship at 8:00am & 7:00pm, in the sanctuary. The 7:00pm service will be livestreamed online.

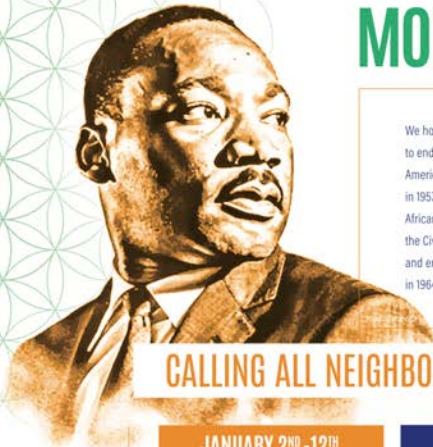
Christians often participate in Lent by taking on a spiritual practice or discipline, as a form of a "fast." The intention is to focus on Christ and his sacrifice for us. Some may break an unhealthy habit by giving up sweets or soda. Others might start a healthy habit, give to charity, join a small group, or try a new prayer activity. Consider what you might "give up" or do differently to set apart these forty days of Lent.

BECOMING BETTER NEIGHBORS PROUDLY PRESENTS:

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

JOIN US FOR A DAY OF UNITY IN THE COMMUNITY

MONDAY, JANUARY 15TH



We honor Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist minister who advocated the use of nonviolent means to end racial segregation. He came to national prominence during a 1955 bus boycott by African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama. He founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1957 and led the 1963 March on Washington. MLK Jr. stands as one of the most influential African American civil rights leaders during the 1960s. He was instrumental in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed discrimination in public accommodations, facilities, and employment, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. King was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1964; he was tragically assassinated on April 4, 1968.

CALLING ALL NEIGHBORS! JOIN US AT THESE MLK EVENTS:

(For more detailed event information, scan the QR code located at the bottom left of this poster!)



event details
SCAN HERE!

BecomingBetterNeighbors.com
BecomingBetterNeighbors@outlook.com
180853-1022

JANUARY 2ND - 12TH

UNITY THROUGH SERVICE

food drive

Marginalized communities deal with poverty and food insecurity at a high rate. Let's bridge that gap on MLK Day. Help provide our neighbors a healthy meal during their time of hardship.

PARTICIPATING LOCATIONS:

CREEKSIDE PLACE | 102 Maple Street
ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH | 319 S. Third Street
EVANSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL (OFFICE) | 640 S 5th St
EVANSVILLE FORD | 428 N. Union Street

- 1) Select a MLK Act of Service Card on display at locations **beginning Jan 2nd**.
- 2) Return listed items to same location:
Non-perishable items - Jan 2nd-12th, perishable - Jan 8th-12th

JANUARY 15TH | 12-12:30PM

UNITY THROUGH REFLECTION

labyrinth walk

Join us at Evansville Peace Garden at noon for a reflection on Martin Luther King, Jr.

Pastor Matthew Pook (from St. John's Lutheran Church) will be your guide on a thoughtful Labyrinth walk. This serene event will focus on key concepts of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s legacy & Unity in the Community.

Evansville Peace Garden
Seminary Park | 26 S Fourth Street

JANUARY 8TH

UNITY THROUGH WRITING

essay contest

What dream do you have for equality, justice, and change toward a better future for our country? All ages welcome to submit an essay entry.

\$25 CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
GIFT CERTIFICATE PRIZE.

Essay contest winner or their chosen representative will be asked to read their speech at the MLK event on Jan. 15 at 2 pm.

Eager Free Public Library | 39 W Main St

JANUARY 15TH | 2PM

UNITY THROUGH WRITING

essay entry WINNER

Join us at the Eager Free Public Library to listen to an excerpt from MLK's "I Have a Dream" speech, originally delivered on Aug. 28, 1963, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

Excerpt will be read by student Max Mangold, followed by a reading from our essay contest winner.

Light refreshments served.

Eager Free Public Library | 39 W Main St

JANUARY 15TH | 10-11:30AM

UNITY THROUGH SERVICE

meal & SIGN-MAKING

Join us at Creekside Place with family and friends - all ages welcome. We will be prepping and preparing food for our neighbors in need. We will also have a creative sign-making project for those that want to express their hope for Unity through artistic expression. Everyone will find a way to contribute and be part of this community kindness in action. Refreshments and light snacks will be available & all supplies will be provided.

Creekside Place | 102 Maple St

JANUARY 15TH | 6-7:30PM

UNITY THROUGH COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION

speaker EVENT

FEATURED SPEAKERS:
OFFICER O'MALLEY (OMAX, FORMER EVANSVILLE PD)
AJA MUZOVERA, YOUTH LEADER

Join us for a moderated conversation about systemic racism and its impact on opportunity and achievement. This evening is designed to elevate individual & community racial literacy through shared storytelling, empathy building & community connection.

Evansville High School | 640 S 5th St

REACHING WITHIN: SPIRITUAL GROWTH & FRIENDSHIP

2024 Annual Theme — Holy Community: Better Together

On May 3, 2023, the US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy called attention to the public health crisis of loneliness, isolation, and lack of connection in our country. Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately half of U.S. adults reported experiencing measurable levels of loneliness.



Disconnection fundamentally affects our mental, physical, and societal health. In fact, loneliness and isolation increase the risk for individuals to develop mental health challenges in their lives, and lacking connection can increase the risk for premature death to levels comparable to smoking daily. Loneliness increases the risk of premature death by more than 60%. Loneliness and isolation are killing us and diminishing our lives. The Surgeon General said: “Our epidemic of loneliness and isolation has been an underappreciated public health crisis that has harmed individual and societal health. Our relationships are a source of healing and well-being.”



Since 2018, St. John’s has intentionally focused a year on each of our values: Inspiring Worship, Uplifting Prayer, Lifelong Spiritual Growth, Christ-Centered Friendship, Caring Invitation, and Faithful Service. Both the staff and council are excited to share the theme for 2024, a culminating focus that encompasses all of our values - Holy Community: Better Together. There are plenty of opportunities to have community, from the bowling alley to card club to soccer field sidelines to even your co-workers. But there is something important and “set apart” about a Church community.

The Church has been a place of community since its beginning. Consider first our founder, leader, and savior – our Lord Jesus Christ. He never married, but he had intentional community and relationships. He had a large group of followers – about 70 whom he sent out on mission. He had a small group of followers – 12 close disciples. He had an inner circle with three others – Peter, James, and John. Plus, let’s remember that Jesus had some alone time, for prayer and renewal. Jesus modeled for us healthy connections with other people.

The Church, at its best, is an intergenerational community of love and support, grounded in the love of Jesus Christ. There’s no other organization on earth quite like it. The Church is not perfect, that’s for sure. It’s full of imperfect people. We don’t always agree. We don’t all think alike. But we strive to live in love, kindness, service, humility, and peace. This congregation is ALL ABOUT relationships – with God, neighbors, one another. You don’t have to know everyone’s name. You can’t participate in everything we do. But there is a place here for everyone, for you. We need each other. We need you. Let us commit to sharing life together. We are, always have been, and are intended to live – connected to one another.

Look ahead to a year filled with Holy Community. Maybe you will wear a nametag more often. Or an invitation to people’s homes will come more often. Or maybe you will experience more potlucks. Whatever comes this year, it will be “better together.”



Our Mission Statement

Reaching Up, Reaching Out, Reaching Within...
because GOD reaches out to us.

Our Core Values

Inspiring Worship
Faithful Service
Lifelong Spiritual Growth

Uplifting Prayer
Caring Invitation
Christ-Centered Friendships

January Adult BASIC

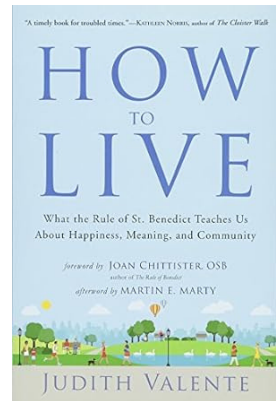
Each Sunday at 10:15am St. John's will hosts an opportunity to learn and grow alongside one another. Grab a mug, a snack, and a friend to grow in faith and connection. Our January lineup:

- **Jan 7:** ALPHA — What about the church?
- **Jan 14:** ALPHA — Why and how should I tell others?
- **Jan 21:** Bible Study with Pastor Matt
- **Jan 28:** Congregational Annual Meeting, followed by brunch



Lent Small Groups Start in February!

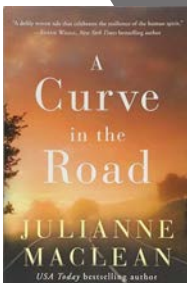
One way we are better together is when we grow together. Starting in February, St. John's will gather in small groups six times to discuss and apply the book How to Live: What the Rule of St. Benedict Teaches Us About Happiness, Meaning, and Community by Judith Valente. "The *Rule of St. Benedict* comes from an era when a great civilization was threatened by violence, corrupt political leadership, a widening gulf between rich and poor, and rampant xenophobia." Sixth-century Rome was much like the news we see in the 21st century. Look for books and signups in the Gathering Area. All are welcome!



Whatcha Reading? with Dawn Yeager

A Curve in the Road by Julianne Maclean

We can probably all relate to a season in life that seemed to be a smooth road, routine and uneventful. And then a "curve in the road" throws life into an unknown, chaotic mess. This book portrays the life of Abbie MacIntyre, a surgeon living the dream in Nova Scotia. It is a suspenseful read and contains hidden truths within a seemingly perfect marriage. A tragic event happens and along the way she finds out what she is truly made of. Lies, healing, learning to trust again, and finding new hope fill the pages of this fictional account. Dawn says, "I really liked it...and really, forgiveness is necessary to be able to move forward."



Financial Peace University: A New Year's Gift for Yourself

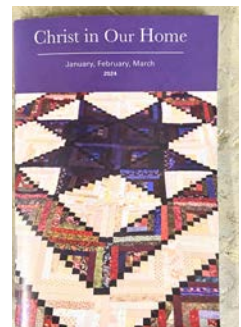
Never worry about money again with Financial Peace University (FPU), the nine-lesson course that gives you the proven plan to master budgeting, pay off debt, build wealth, and give generously. The course centers around lessons taught via video by Dave Ramsey, Rachel Cruze, George Kamel, and Dr. John Delony, followed by small group discussions.



Sessions are hosted by Eric Hessler, retired accountant and course alum. **FPU will meet on Thursdays, January 11 - March 7, from 6:30-8:00pm, at St. John's Fellowship Hall.** Your family membership fee is \$80 per household and includes a free year of membership, with online tools to support your journey. Childcare is included upon request. For more info contact Chris Cole (office@stjohns-lc.org.) Your financial health would be a great gift for 2024. It's not a magic bullet, but FPU will teach you to take control of your money, invest for the future, and give like never before.

Christ in our Home Devotional Books Available

This daily devotional resource is a great way to read the Scriptures and grow in faith. The current edition (January-March) is available for you in the Gathering Area. Each devotion is written by a variety of writers including a runner, sailor, pastor, blogger, occupational therapist, and pet owner from across the country. Whether alone or with your family, let these one-page readings be a guide for prayer and reflection. Let these moments foster community between you and God.



St. John's Welcome Statement

Jesus commands us to love one another. We welcome all, regardless of race or culture, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or relationship status. We welcome all without regard to addictions, physical or mental health, past misdeeds, socio-economic circumstances, immigration status, or anything that too often divides us. We welcome and celebrate diversity and uniqueness.

We welcome you.

Annual Meeting: God's Mission Through St. John's



The Annual Congregational Meeting of St. John's is scheduled for **Sunday, January 28, at 10:15am**, following 9:00am worship and before brunch. All members are asked to be present for the business of the congregation. We will hear reports, reflect on the previous year, look ahead to 2024, and approve our operating budget. After all the business, the high school members of our community are hosting a brunch to raise money for the National ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans, July 2024. **This meeting is an annual reminder that together we share the responsibility and joy of God's work among us.**



My Sense of Community by Lindsay Jobe

What does church community mean to me? To me it's having a whole other family that is there for you and is ready and willing to support you in any way they can. I'm so thankful that after moving back to Evansville in 2018, during one of the most turbulent times in life, that I found St. John's. I feel the Lord blessed me with this amazing community of people that didn't hesitate to call and check in about our child's health struggles, drop off meals, and most importantly pray for us. I truly believe there's power in prayer!



Through all of that, I've become more involved in our church and enjoy helping and learning with all of you. I have made so many friends and being here has improved my family's relationship with the Lord. Church offers a place to congregate and spend time with people who share a variety of experiences that help to shape us as people, and **it is those experiences that make us better together.**

Making Connections: Jim and Stephanie Kvalheim



Hello St. John's friends! We're the Kvalheim family – Jim, Steph, Caleb, and Aaron. Jim, an Agriscience teacher and FFA Advisor at Evansville High School, has a unique side gig as a mandolin player for a local bluegrass band, Soggy Prairie. He's also a skilled luthier and tries his hand at beekeeping and maple sugaring. Steph is a veterinarian at Evansville Veterinary Service. Outside of work, she finds joy in reading and cooking, attempting to master the art of sourdough, egg nog, and various cuisines like Mexican and pizza.

Our third-grade fraternal twins, Caleb and Aaron, keep us on our toes with their pursuits. They are proud proprietors of The Meatball Egg Company, overseeing 15 chickens and enjoying the responsibilities that come with it. Both boys are learning piano. Caleb enjoys tumbling and gymnastics, while Aaron has joined the wrestling world. Outdoor adventures are family favorites, including kayaking, canoeing, camping, hiking, swimming, and biking. In addition to the chickens, we have two cats, Alibi and Dennis.

Family and Christmas traditions brought us to St. John's. We moved to Evansville in 2007 but didn't seek out a local church home until 2010. That fall, we were slated to host Jim's family for Christmas. We didn't think it would be a great idea to show up with 12 people at a church we had never been to, so the two of us started attending services that October, "in preparation." For over 13 years, we haven't stopped! At Christmas that year, we were quite surprised to learn that Jim was baptized at St. John's 26 years earlier, when his parents were briefly living in Evansville! This little bit of trivia remains a special connection to our church home.



What we love most about St. John's is the sense of community. For over a decade, we've found a welcoming space where everyone has a place. Members care for the community outside of the church itself. The ever-evolving nature of the church keeps our experience fresh and meaningful.



Personally, special memories with St. John's include the meal train organized for us when the boys were born, as well as their baptism and following milestones. Participating in Financial Peace University helped us learn to budget. Small group participation taught us how to pray – to really, comfortably pray – out loud and privately. Currently, we treasure the faith formations that St. John's is helping us build in our children and ourselves.

As St. John's serves us, we also enjoy serving the church. Jim plays with the praise team and for special music services when able. Steph volunteers as an assisting minister and has served on the church council in the past. We have both facilitated small group studies, and Steph helped with children's ministries before the boys were born.

In addition to our time and talent, we give financially to St. John's. We make a weekly electronic offering to general ministries, knowing that the funds are put to good use in our church and community as well as nationally and globally. Special appeals are also important to us – such as refurbishing the grand piano in the sanctuary – so we give additionally when we can. Growing in faith has taught us that “for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6:21.)



Care Circle

The Congregational Care Faith Circle is a confidential gathering open to all who are enduring hardships.

Come on Tuesdays, January 9 & 23, 1:00-2:00pm.

Holy Community Opportunity: Bunco + Potluck Night – January 13



St. John's starts the year with a Holy Community event that couldn't be simpler. Maybe you have just started connecting with St. John's; this night is for you. Maybe you have been a part of St. John's your whole life; this night is for you. Maybe you have a friend who is curious about St. John's; this night is for them.



The evening starts with worship at 5pm where we gather to praise the Lord and receive Holy Communion. Then get your tastebuds ready for an eclectic meal — a potluck at 6pm! Yes, you don't quite know what you'll eat that night, but that's all part of the fun. Bring an appetizer, salad, main dish, dessert, or anything in between to share with the whole. (Of course, if the mystery of the potluck is overwhelming, bring something you KNOW you would eat.) Then the fun continues with no game that could be easier to play: BUNCO. People of all ages roll three dice to come up with 3 of a kind. Tables mix and move, so everyone meets lots of different people. Reserve Saturday, January 13 and invite your friends to a night of fun and laughter!

Keep on the lookout for more Holy Community events like Dinner for 9, Golden Agers, Pub Theology, Potluck Mixers, Block Parties, and more!

“We have all known the long loneliness, and we have found that the answer is community.”
— Dorothy Day



FEATURE: A Place to Belong by Becca Pook

As St. John's focuses our year on Holy Community, I thought it would be appropriate to reflect on what it is that makes me feel like I'm a part of a community. But really, it's definitely easier to remember when I didn't feel like a part of a community. Or worse, I didn't belong.



In my early years of ministry, I served at a camp and retreat center as year-round staff. I distinctly remember putting a mailing together when a synod staff person visited the front office. He started some small talk with our office manager and was pontificating about women as pastors. He was bemoaning "how *these* women take a scholarship for seminary, but just end up at home with their kids." I was crushed. This was the exact season in my life that I was discerning going to seminary. I was asking the question, "Is God calling me to be a pastor?" And this conversation affected me deeply. I believed that I didn't belong becoming a pastor; furthermore, my dream of being a mother and a minister was offensive and a waste of the Church's money. The Church had always been safe and a home for me, but this dejection was something I couldn't shake.

Well, God redeemed this hurt and pain. I did earn my degree at seminary, and I am serving in the Church. I did not pursue ordination, but St. John's has always received me, as mother, leader, preacher, musician, sibling. I pray that all people of St. John's know and trust that God is calling them with all their hopes, dreams, and gifts. You belong no matter what someone else says about who you are or what your dreams may be.

Here are some other vulnerable and honest reflections on experiences of belonging:

Kristie Carlsen

Recently, I attended a disability conference in the Dells, and at the end of the conference there was a dance. I have epilepsy and noticed strobe lights, which is something I was taught to be cautious of. I asked someone and was told they would look into



it. I waited out in the hallway and finally I had to ask again. I was then told that the lights were off, though I was able to see they were still flashing. I felt sad I couldn't participate in what should have been an inclusive event for all.

Attending church makes me feel very welcome. Everyone is open to hearing my opinions and thoughts. If a person is aware of my autism, they do what they can to accommodate. I've been able to speak on my autism and help implement pipe cleaners and ear plugs to help others. Even continuing to use the peace sign instead of having to shake hands is helpful. I enter the church and feel a big sigh of relief knowing there are routines and faces I can count on. I get to hear messages about people I can relate to and a lot of my anxiety goes away.

Joy Morrison

I was the girls' basketball head coach at Lodi High School during 1980-1983. It was an exciting time to be a coach and for players, as the game was gaining popularity with the passing of Title IX. During my tenure, we were Capital Conference champions. I was a member of the Wisconsin Basketball Coaches Association. I attended many coaches clinics and conferences during this time. National, prominent coaches were featured as presenters. These opportunities provided insight into teaching and training techniques, strategies, what makes for a successful program. In short, all things basketball.



The most obvious demographic at these events was that often I was the only female coach in the room. The male coaches were cordial but not necessarily welcoming. Sometimes, they were members of our own conference and therefore rivals. The addition of women's sports meant they had to share gym schedules, budgets, attention, and all available resources.

During lunch and session breaks, the men included each other in conversation easily. Many were long-time friends. I sat at lunch at the

UW Field House surrounded by coaches that didn't talk to me. It was not an intentional snub, but they acted like I had nothing in common with them. It was awkward, as if I was taking up their air space. Fortunately, things have changed as time has passed for the better.

The sense of community and belonging are encouraged at St. John's. All are welcome! We have evolved here also and have placed a large emphasis on making connections with visitors and members. The sense of teamwork is as essential to this church as it is to the sports programs. If we all pull together, we can pull ahead.

Beatriz Hernandez de Grover

Attending worship was always expected in my family of origin. I liked singing in the choir at worship. I believed God wanted us to care for everyone – poor, needy, children, elderly. As I grew up in the church, I began to notice things I didn't think were what the church was about. However, I knew I couldn't be honest about what I was feeling and questioning. This was not a church that welcomed discussion about anything.



I was accused of wanting to know more than God, but I just wanted to understand the differences I was witnessing. First, the pastor had a new car every year. I wondered, "How can he justify that when there were a lot of people in need, cold, or hungry?" And then I would see him at smaller churches in town acting immaturely and much like the teens in town. How could this person be representing Jesus? I did not go back to that church much to my mom's disappointment.

I moved to the US and joined my sister and her family at their church. Again, I did not feel good when I left worship. Sometimes I left feeling nothing. It felt fake and did not touch my heart. I didn't belong there. I believed in God, but I didn't know why I didn't fit at any of these churches. Later I got married and had two children. My husband's mother was a member at St. John's. We knew that faith in God would be a foundation for our family, so we went to worship at St. John's.

From the beginning of the worship service, it felt better. I could understand what the sermon was about and appreciate the sincerity of Pastor Matt's words. I felt connected. I felt the love and forgiveness that Jesus is about. This community was open-minded and welcoming. St. John's still feels like a big party, even if we haven't been there in a while. When I see people, they are welcoming. When people talk to me, they are friendly. I have *always* felt welcomed at St. John's. This is where I belong.

Justin Marshall

After having a stroke at a young age, and subsequently being a wheelchair user for life, I have often run into places that were unable to accommodate my needs. Often a small physical barrier can be enough to make someone feel excluded. In fact, this is what led me to my career path as an architectural designer to help alleviate these problems. After moving to the area, my wife and I began looking for a church and congregation to become a part of. Not only had we heard great things about the community of St. John's, but I also drove by a few of the churches and noticed St. John's had been adapted to be accessible.



Thankfully that act of providing access has led us to joining the St. John's congregation. We couldn't be happier with all the friendly faces, the worship services and Pastor Matt's visits to our sons. We thank everyone for their support and making us feel welcomed.

Prayer Team

The Prayer Team of St. John's is ready to pray with you — for healing, hope, wisdom, gratitude, and more. See the welcome desk and pew racks for a prayer card to fill out and return in the offering boxes, to the office, or see our website for a confidential online request form.

*For more information on the prayer team,
contact Becca Poock at 608-490-3144.*

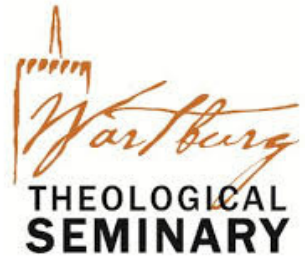
REACHING OUT: SERVICE & INVITATION



Council Matters by Keith Miller

On December 11, the Church Council gathered with our visiting staff member, Chris Cole. After calling the meeting to order at 7:00 pm, we prayed in triads sharing our highs and lows for the day. Then we listened to Luke Chapter 1 concerning the angel Gabriel visiting Mary, and Mary subsequently visiting Elizabeth. It was very uplifting.

Next, the council unanimously approved the November minutes. The Pastor's report was presented by Chris and she reported that the staff was happy and very productive. Pastor Matt and Carolyn Butts submitted the application to Wartburg Theological Seminary for a new pastoral intern, and we will know by mid-March if an intern will be placed at St. John's. The council then discussed Chapter 3 from [When Church Stops Working](#) by Andrew Root and Blair D. Bertrand, and the quote that had the most impact was "Be present in the present."



The results from the council election were successful with Brandon Mohrbacher, Keith Miller, Julie Creek-Hessler, and Kaye Crocker being elected. The 2024 council members will be installed during worship on January 7. Finally, a motion to adjourn was made at 8:55 pm and unanimously approved.

Stay Connected with St. John's



Online at www.StJohns-LC.org

On Facebook at facebook.com/St-Johns-Lutheran-Church-Evansville-WI-145437998849063/

With Daily Nudge Text Message Devotions at trunc.us/db47CB

Budget Matters

Our St. John's ministries are expanding, which means our hopes for generosity are growing. The church council has approved an **operating budget of \$542,952 for 2024**. This is a 6.3% increase over last year's budget of \$510,769.



Our budget has grown every year for the past 13 years, and it will again, with some significant changes. We have launched Little Fish Preschool and have included tuition and staffing in our budget.

We have re-configured our staff to absorb the previous Director of Faith Formation position. Instead of that position, our new Children's Ministry Director Callie Jones will serve at half time. This shifts (and expands) those duties from our Office Manager Chris Cole. Instead, Chris will now provide administrative support to Pastor Matt for all learning and service ministries, including adult education, high school youth, and confirmation. Chris also now serves as our preschool administrator. In addition, we have budgeted for a pastoral intern to begin with us in summer 2024, which accounts for 4% of the budget increase. We will know by April if we have been matched with an intern. Also, in staffing, we have provided generous raises for all returning staff members, for the excellent and faithful work they do.

In other ministry areas, we have increased our budget for worship supplies, outreach ministry, off-site learning events, high school youth ministry (for the ELCA Youth Gathering), Kids Against Hunger meal packaging, administrative expenses, utilities, and insurance. These increases are due to both expanding ministry and increasing costs. Finally, Council has proposed increasing our support to our local AWARE agency and Lutherdale Bible Camp. **Our total charitable giving as a church will increase over last year for a total of 13.1% of our budget.** What a blessing to give! This budget goes to the congregation for approval at our Annual Meeting on January 28.

This is our largest budget ever, and it invites our faithful and generous response. We have every expectation that St. John's will finish the 2023 financial year in a strong position, to help launch us into 2024. Our staff and ministry leaders are careful stewards of our resources. This proposed increase in offering income is consistent with our recent history and with the joyous generosity of our congregation. Consider if you might grow your generosity to St. John's by 5% to help us expand our ministries and reach out with God's love. Perhaps the Simply Giving Challenge is right for you (see below). **We trust God to provide and to grow us as generous followers of Jesus.**

"24" Simply Giving Challenge for 2024: \$100 Grocery Trip

St. John's is a generous congregation, which is evident as we end 2023 financially healthy. One of the reasons our giving remains strong is because of households who give their offering consistently and intentionally. One easy way to do that is to give automatically using *Simply Giving*, our electronic funds transfer option. These offerings allow each household to determine a monthly gift that fits their budget and to provide St. John's with a reliable, steady stream of financial support.



You are invited to join the 145 St. John's households who already use *Simply Giving*. **We are looking for 24 households to begin or increase their financial offering through *Simply Giving*.** It's easy to set up, and it helps keep a commitment to generosity. When we reach our goal, we'll have a drawing and the winner will receive \$100 to the Piggly Wiggly!

To start or update your commitment with Simply Giving, see our website or email our financial director Deb Herbers at finances@stjohns-lc.org.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Deb Herbers', written in a cursive style.

Annual Hunger Mission Project — February 4

For 12 years, St. John's has focused on those who are hungry in our world. Jesus says in Matthew 25, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. ...Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these siblings of mine, you did for me." On **Sunday, February 4, from 10:15am – 12:45pm**, we will live out our core value of *Faithful Service* in an on-site mission project packing food for the Kids Against Hunger organization.



Kids Against Hunger is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to package and ship highly nutritious, life-saving meals to starving and malnourished children in developing countries and the United States. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that about 821 million people in the world, or one in nine face hunger, and one in three suffer from some form of malnutrition in 2021. Every 10 seconds a child dies (nearly 16,000 every day) because of hunger and related causes. 16.2 million children under 18 in the United States live in households where they are unable to consistently access enough nutritious food necessary for a healthy life.



In about two hours, we will package nutritionally-rich meals full of proteins, carbohydrates, and vitamins that are easily digestible — perfect for a malnourished body and mind. **The contents of each meal cost \$0.21, and we'll package 25,000 meals!** (To think, the \$7 we spend on a kid's meal at Culver's could feed 33 children.) We'll combine our resources for the \$5,250 needed to pay for the food and shipping. This is a large event that requires many people. Come serve on Sunday, February 4. It will be an experience to live out your faith and make an impact on children "around the world and around the corner."



Personal Care Kits for Lutheran World Relief



Often when natural disasters strike or when war drives families from their homes, our hearts ache with compassion, but we don't know how to help. Making Lutheran World Relief Kits is a simple, tangible way to offer comfort to those suffering and express love to our neighbors in need. LWR Kits are specifically designed to help people coping with poverty, disaster, conflict and more. **LWR Kits provide dignity and hope in the direst situations.**

Cleanliness may not actually be next to godliness, but it certainly helps a person feel more human. When families find their homes destroyed, or must flee for their safety, soap and a towel rarely make the cut for what they can carry. Arriving in a refugee camp or other place of safety, they are scared, vulnerable, and dirty from the travel. The simple items included in a Personal Care Kit provide much needed self-care, critical germ fighting, and the chance to regain dignity amidst situations of fear and uncertainty. Last year, St. John's collected 74 personal care kits. Church, let's strive to make 100 personal care kits to send across the world.

During the months of January and February, we will focus on collecting the following NEW items:

- Light-weight bath-size towels, (between 20" x 40" and 52" x 27"), dark color recommended
- Bath-size bars of soap, 8-9oz., any brand, in original wrapping
- Adult-size toothbrushes in original wrapping (multi-packs accepted)
- Sturdy combs, remove packaging
- Metal nail clippers, remove packaging



Meals on Wheels in February

St. John's is delivering Meals on Wheels to Evansville residents during the weekdays of February. Volunteers will pick up meals at Creekside Place Monday-Friday at 11:00am. Then the joy of serving our homebound and elderly begins as we deliver to their homes.



Just pick one day on the Ministry Table or call the office to select your day. **St. John's has one extra delivery this year since there are 29 days in February.** Any questions, contact Glenace Smelcer at 882-5726.



Green Living Tip: New Year, New Energy Reduction Resolutions

by Lindsay Trustem

The New Year brings time for prayer, reflection, and a chance to set eco-friendly goals. Don't let it be overwhelming; there are many simple, no-cost ways to reduce energy consumption. Take time to closely review your electric bill and understand what your current energy usage is. Then, set a realistic goal to reduce your energy usage by a certain percentage over the course of 2024.

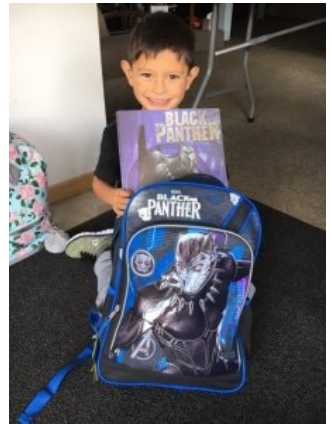
Small, consistent changes eventually add up to big, long-lasting results:

- Lower your thermostat when you are gone or sleeping. You can save on average 1% for each degree that you turn your thermostat down per 8-hour period.
- If you have an electric dryer, think before turning it on. If you can't air dry (inside or outside the home), be sure to only use the dryer for full loads. The lint trap is an important energy saver. One of the easiest things you can do to increase drying efficiency is to clean it before each load.
- Let the natural sunlight heat your home for free. Open your window coverings during the day, and be sure to close them at night.
- Unplug appliances when not in use. Many appliances consume energy even when they are turned off. Unplugging them can help reduce your energy consumption. If you have power strips, you can simply turn off the power strip versus having to unplug the cord from the socket.

Charity Highlight: AWARE in Evansville

Our 2023 budget included a commitment of \$1000 to support local charities, including AWARE in Evansville, a program of Community Action, Inc, and a funded partner of United Way Blackhawk Region.

AWARE in Evansville's mission is to identify needs, research solutions, and coordinate resources that provide support for economically and socially disadvantaged members of the Evansville community. AWARE focuses its work specifically on the needs of Evansville. Through conversations with the people it serves, AWARE develops the services and opportunities local residents need to help themselves achieve a better life. AWARE's free annual programs include: Snackpackers, Toys for Evansville, Coats for Kids, Easter Holiday Food, Emergency Prescription and Housing Assistance, and Annual Drives (food, diapers, school supplies, etc). AWARE is doing God's work, and we're proud to be part of it.



Sandy Persons Receives Service Award

Sandy Persons was awarded the Jack and Dorothy McElroy Service Award at the Evansville Ecumenical Care Closet. She was recognized for her passion, reliability, teamwork, positive attitude, and patience. Sandy takes her responsibility seriously, coming in many extra hours to make sure the Care Closet is ready.



Sandy attends to the guidelines to ensure quality and safety, and demonstrates patience when the inventory is altered. Although she loves to quilt, she serves on Tuesday mornings to make sure the Pantry runs smoothly on distribution day. Sandy Persons lives in the Way of Jesus by serving with all her heart. Congratulations, Sandy!

Missionary Moment: Pastor Carl and Kelsey Grulke + 5

Happy New Year! In August, MaryJane began her freshman year at Denver South High School. She is living with Kelsey's family in Denver and having a great time. Her class of 400 is quite the change from her class of 10 at Matshwane Secondary School! She is enjoying the wide variety of options available to her both at school and within Denver.

Thankfully, she flew home mid-December and was with us for two weeks for Christmas.



The launch of the Shekgalagari New Testament was scheduled for November but has been moved to March 9, 2024. This will allow more time for copies to arrive from the printer, and gives the community

more time to raise awareness and funds to give this New Testament a big launch. They are hopeful it will receive national attention, including being featured on TV and attended by high-level government officials.

Join us in praying for God's word to be in the hands and hearts of all Bakgalagari people at the right time, in the right format.

Another advantage of delaying the New Testament launch is that it gives us more time to produce other ways for Bakgalagari people to absorb scripture. We are currently recording the New Testament in audio format, with the help of Faith Comes by Hearing. Two technicians flew in from Kenya, made a makeshift studio at a house in the village of Kang, auditioned voices, and began recording at the beginning of November. We expect the editing process to be completed early next year, at which time we will begin producing micro-SD cards, so people can listen to their New Testament right on their phones. We will also create a smartphone app, so that those with smartphones can hear and read along with the New Testament. Single-book apps that we have already distributed have been very well received. We are excited to see what God does with the whole New Testament on people's phones.

Pastor Carl, Kelsey, MaryJane, Audrey, Judah, Gideon, and Isaac have served with Lutheran Bible Translators in Botswana since 2018.

CHILDREN'S & YOUTH MINISTRIES



Angels Say What?!

Thank you
1st-5th grades
for an awesome
Christmas musical!



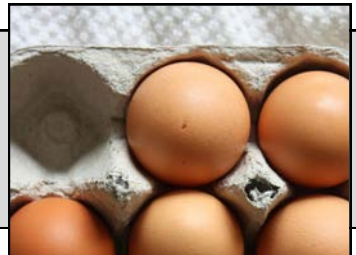
Children, Youth & Family (CYF)

Calendar Highlights for January 2024:

- Wednesday, Jan. 3rd: FC/ST Resume
- Friday, Jan. 5th: Middle School Up All Night 7-11pm
- Sunday, Jan. 7th: BASIC Resumes
- Sunday, Jan. 7th: Remember Your Baptism Milestone (Kindergarteners) at 9am worship; Workshop at 10:15
- Sunday, Jan. 14th: Ten Commandments Milestone (1st graders) at 9am worship; Workshop at 10:15
- January 21st: NO BASIC / Women's Retreat
- January 28th: NO BASIC / Annual Meeting

*Questions about ministries for children 5th grade and younger?
Contact Callie Jones at children@stjohns-lc.org!*

*Make sure the Annual Meeting Brunch is on
your calendar for Sunday, January 28th!
High School youth are raising funds for the
ELCA National Youth Gathering
in New Orleans.*



IN OUR THOUGHTS & PRAYERS

St. John's Members

Michael Adams	Adam Kopp	Jeff Farnsworth	Jeanette Schunk
John Almond	Warren Yoerger	Kira Tortomasi	Barb Nieman

Family & Friends

Braiden Bergum	Marlene Jones	Orrin	Linda Harris
Rosemary Wangard	Craig Thompson	Kristin Davis	Tom Timm
Bill Springer	Wendy McClure	Jody Jones	Mike Feirn
Sandra Zahn	Barb Buttchen	Jodi Syer	Georgan Nicholson

Partners in Mission:

Rev. Carl and Kelsey Grulke & family, in Botswana
Rev. Bridget Gautieri in Germany
Ashley Bowman, Wartburg Theological Seminary
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, New Orleans

Men and Women in Service:

Matt Forster, Nate Madsen, Bailey Olin, Tyler Schnell, Hunter Speropulos,
Marcus Steindl, Mark Trawicki, Heather Ihlenfeldt, Branden Samela, Samantha Ihlenfeldt

Condolences to:

Sandra Lindemann, Jeremie (Bethany) Steindl, Jerod (Cristy) Steindl and family as they grieve the death of their mother and grandmother Shirley Kalscheur.

Scott (Kim) Katzenmeyer and family as they grieve the death of his mother Sue Katzenmeyer.

Larry (Joy) Olson and family as they grieve the death of his uncle Kenneth and his mother Pauline.

Lynda (Todd) Mosely and family as they grieve the death of her mother Judene.

Barb George and family as they grieve the death of her mother Darlene.

Mike (Lisa), Josh (Sara) Stadt and family as they grieve the death of their grandmother Donna.

Congratulations to:

Brian and Kelsey Anderson on the birth of their son Archer. Archer is welcomed by grandmother Beth Zee and great-grandmother Joan Fisk.

Melissa Fisher and Mike Harnack on their wedding.

Rylan and Jessie Smelcer on the birth of their son Holden. Holden is welcomed by great-grandmother Glenace Smelcer.

Madison and Kurt Bennett on the birth of their daughter Gemma. Gemma is welcomed by grandparents Mary and Keith Hennig.

POINTS OF PRAYER

Together we lift up these prayer concerns. Start by reading the prayer topic and “holding” those people or that situation before God. Say the topic over and over in your mind, or aloud, and raise it before God. Then continue in agreement with the petition of prayer. We pray:

For healing

Gracious God, we feel helpless in the face of war. As we witness the devastation in Israel and Palestine, we feel it here, too. Help us to accompany all who suffer, to be your healing balm in this wounded world. When we feel helpless, help us to feel your presence. When we feel despair, restore our confidence in you alone. Teach us again to turn weapons into tools for harvesting your abundance. Remind us that true healing comes only in the presence of your truth, your justice, and your peace.

For the New Year

God of beginnings, you gave your Son so that we might have forgiveness and a fresh start every day. Let this New Year be a time to recommit ourselves to loving you with our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Give us the faith to put you first in our lives. Give us the strength to do your will and to truly love our neighbors.

For those without homes

God our Refuge, open the doors of shelters to those who seek warmth and safety. Bless children, women, and men who do not have consistent housing. Heal the hurt and pain this brings, and reveal real solutions to each families' stories. Open our eyes to see homelessness in Evansville, and move us to action.

We pray in the name of Jesus, Amen.

Bible Study on Thursdays at 1:00pm with Pastor Matt

You are invited to join Pastor Matt every Thursday afternoon at 1:00pm for Bible Study in the lounge. Each week we'll preview the upcoming weekend's scripture reading through reflection and conversation. No experience necessary. Come when you can; our group is different every week. What remains constant is that we always laugh and learn together.



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Evansville, WI 53536

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